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Franz Boas and the Columbian Field Museum

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Abstract

The Late Nineteenth Century was a period of major flux within the world of American anthropology. Two major centers of power had emerged within the nascent field. Federally sponsored anthropologists clashed with academic institutions, especially those associated with Harvard's Frederic Ward Putnam. These two bodies found themselves at odds over methodological design and the theoretical frameworks supporting their research. These issues would span the breadth of anthropology as a field, but nowhere was it more visible than in the scope of museum studies. Public displays of anthropological thought were the most direct way that scholars were able to present their findings to the general public. The ideas that these displays conveyed would inform the nation's public on the world around them, and their rightful place in it. Federal anthropologists and their subscription to Social Evolutionary theory painted all human societies as existing on the same linear quest towards an idealized civilization. Putnam and his followers believed that societies needed to be classified by the unique geographical and temporal spaces in which they occupied. The issues of museum management would come to a head in the months following the Chicago World's Columbian Exhibition with the formation of the Columbian Field Museum. The newly established museum, and the city of Chicago itself, became a hotly contested center for both groups hoping to establish a cultural foothold in the heart of America. It is within this context that Franz Boas, a pivotal figure within anthropology, and his involvement in not only the museum but the larger debate as a whole is investigated. Through an analysis of Franz Boas' early career, this paper explores the social, methodological, and racial divides that defined early American anthropology and its place within the Nation's narrative.

Franz Boas and the Columbian Museum of Chicago

In February of 2013, Marshall Sahlins, one of the leading figures of American anthropology, resigned from his position within the US National Academy of Sciences (NAS). In an essay published in May of that year, Sahlins highlighted the rationale for his abrupt departure. His first stated impetus for resignation was the relationship between the NAS and the United States military. He declared that he would not belong to an organization that conducted research projects for the US armed forces to aid in what he perceived as their subjugation of people around the globe. After seizing this humanitarian highground, Sahlins voiced his second complaint: the appointment of Napoleon Chagnon to the Academy. While Chagnon was himself an anthropologist, Sahlins argued vehemently that Chagnon held a dangerous theoretical perspective that caused more harm than good. In Sahlins' mind, Chagnon and his attempts to popularize sociobiological anthropology were unwelcome and unwholesome additions to the field of anthropology. According to Sahlins, Chagnon had violated one of the key tenets of anthropological research in that he had degraded the cultures of the indigenous populations he had studied. Sahlins used the bulk of his essay to provide examples as to why his own stance of symbolic interactionism was the superior, and only method of investigating culture.¹

While this might seem like a singular event, it is in fact only one example among many in a field rife with intradisciplinary conflicts. Anthropology concerns itself with the study of humans and of human cultures. The broad theories of practice employed by the discipline not only define it, but by extension, the nature of humans themselves. Anthropologists such as Sahlins take this charge seriously. Intradisciplinary debates such as that between Sahlins and

¹ Marshall Sahlins, "Human Science," *London Review of Books* 35, no 9 (9 May 2013): 29.

Chagnon have raged across the field since the late 19th Century, a period when anthropology was a nebulous discipline whose goals and practices had yet to be firmly defined. This paper explores Franz Boas, a foundational figure in the world of anthropology, and his early career through the scope of the methodological and theoretical divides found within early American Anthropology and argues that Boas' foundational beliefs and his Jewish heritage hindered his ability to secure professional placement. Research is focused on the appointment of the Smithsonian sponsored William H. Holmes to the curatorship of the newly founded Columbian Field Museum in Chicago, a position that Boas had appeared to have secured. From this central event an investigation follows that uncovers the methodological differences that shaped the research and presentation of early anthropological materials.

Boas, a champion of cultural relativism, often found himself at odds with the Smithsonian Institution, the most powerful entity within the nascent field, especially in regards to public and museum anthropology. The Smithsonian, with its entrenched focus on a singular "culture" and views of humanity as existing along a singular plane of societal progression, displayed its materials in a manner that echoed this belief. Items within museums and exhibitions sponsored by the institution were displayed in a vague chronological order in accordance to their presumed place along an evolutionary spectrum of culture. Boas and his mentor Frederic Ward Putnam, a Harvard anthropologist, argued against this methodology as well as the theory of Social Evolution that framed it, and the two instead advocated for a system of display that placed artifacts within their distinctive cultures.

The academic discipline of anthropology in the early 19th century was formed as a reaction to the deeply imperialist attitudes of expansion embedded within the fabric of the

culture. The anthropology of this era served to validate this pervasive worldview: the conquered were deemed as lesser on the merit of their biological or cultural classifications. Western society (modeled after Great Britain and the United States) was displayed as the very pinnacle of culture. The papers and exhibition pieces presented by the Smithsonian at the time were used to reinforce the public's adoption of this mindset.

This paper also explores Boas' status as a cultural outsider to show the role that this played in the formation of his beliefs and his subsequent treatment by the Smithsonian. It is easy to study the early career of Boas by simply focusing on his academic work and to forget the social realities of the era. Separating the cultural context from published papers provides a sterilized view of them, and contributes only partly to the understanding of why Boas saw his early career stagnate. By investigating Boas' position as a social outsider, we can better understand two major themes found within his early career: the possible formation process of his theoretical beliefs, and an insight into his treatment as a voice of methodological dissent. It should come as no surprise then that Boas, along with other individuals marginalized by a system that placed them within lower social castes, all adopted varying strains of cultural relativism within their work. The validity of their research would be challenged, both because of their backgrounds, but also because it put into question the mantra of linear progressive advancement. If cultures were unique and not encased within a singular sequential system, then the goal of being higher on the cultural totem and dragging the unenlightened masses of the world towards the proverbial "civilization" would be unattainable.

The paper will open with a brief biography of Franz Boas, which is used to clarify his placement as a paramount figure in the world of anthropology. His unique theoretical perspective

as well as his relationship with Putnam are explored, along with a description of his experience as a nonmember of society's elite. Literature focused on the state of anthropology of the late 19th Century, both its culture and its methodologies, as well as the formation of the field and its use as a vehicle for the justification of imperialism is explored in the second portion of the paper. This is done by looking at the theoretical groundwork that established the evolutionary theories of the time and by investigating how this mindset was utilized in a colonial context. Following this is a section devoted to delving into the use of expositions and other public events to bolster a mentality of progress throughout the nation. Both the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition and the Chicago World Columbian Exposition and their uses of anthropology to designate a savage past from a civilized future are presented within this portion of the research. This section will end with an investigation into Boas, Holmes, and the Columbian Museum of Chicago to better understand the circumstances surrounding the appointment of the curatorship position there. A review of contemporary scholarly writings is included, as analyses of this event remain divided.

The Early Career of Franz Boas

Before investigating the events surrounding the Field Museum of Chicago and the controversy surrounding the curatorship there, we first need to understand the early career of Franz Boas. Born in Germany in 1858, Boas spent much of his academic career oscillating between different scientific fields. It was not until deep into his university career that he decided to pursue geography, focusing his efforts on possible expeditionary work. While earning his doctorate in Physics, Boas found himself fascinated with the relationship between landscape and culture in "primitive" societies. The opportunity for such research presented itself when Boas

agreed to an expedition to Baffin Island in the Arctic. There he studied the indigenous Inuit, hoping to learn about how the unique geography of the island impacted them. Along with completing his geographic fieldwork, Boas began to develop an appreciation for the lifeways of the Inuit, questioning the social evolutionary distinction between “savage” and “civilized.” It was here that Boas decided to pursue a career in anthropology.

From Baffin Island, Boas would return to Germany, where in 1885 he found work at the Royal Ethnological Museum in Berlin. It wasn't until increasing anti-semitism began to threaten his sense of security as a Jewish man that Boas left the country for the United States.² In 1886, he was able to secure a job for himself conducting ethnological research focusing on the Native American Tribes of coastal British Columbia. He integrated himself among the Kwakiutl, taking part in daily life, and holding his own potlatch ceremony, a ritual centered around the symbolic gifting of material goods and an integral aspect of Kwakiutl culture. He was particularly interested in the mythology and folklore of the Kwakiutl, but he also collected a number of cultural materials that he intended to ship to New York to offset his expenses. Upon returning to the United States, Boas hoped to secure a job as a museum curator, similar to the position he held in Germany after returning from Baffin Island.³ When no jobs became available, Boas instead turned to *Science* magazine where Frederic Ward Putnam of the Peabody Museum offered him a position focusing on geography.

Putnam has been cited by many, including Boas, as the “Father of American Anthropology.” He was a dominant figure in American Anthropology during the second half of the nineteenth century, holding numerous titles: founder and editor of *American Naturalist*,

² Herbert S. Lewis. “The Passion of Franz Boas.” *American Anthropologist* 103, no. 2 (2001): 451-52.

³ Alexander Lesser, “Franz Boas,” in *Totems and Teachers: Key Figures in the History of Anthropology* edited by Sydel Silverman. (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira, 2003), 2.

permanent secretary of the American Association for the Advancement of Sciences (and through this, an influential role in appointing positions within the journal *Science*), leading figure in the creation of the American Anthropological Association, and most notably head of the Peabody Museum at Harvard.

Putnam's academic roots were planted studying under Louis Agassiz at Harvard where the famed professor enlisted a system of instruction that was more akin to an apprenticeship than a traditional college education. From here, Putnam would work as a curator at the Peabody Museum beginning in 1875. Following the tutelage he had received under Agassiz, Putnam would categorize his anthropological exhibits not on their cultural strata, but instead based on geographical context. This system was based on of a strict methodology where context, location, and, in the case of archaeological excavations, stratigraphy were all key components in designing, organizing, and understanding the cultures that they derived from. He himself saw the difference between his meticulous system of curatorship and those utilized by his Smithsonian counterparts. In his correspondences, he routinely derided the methods used by the Smithsonian in all manner of research, with their archaeological methodologies being likened to grave robbing. This foundational disagreement with Federal Anthropology and the practices it condoned would lead to a rivalry over influence in the rapidly changing world of anthropology.⁴ Putnam was also noted for his willingness to foster the careers of those who occupied the

⁴ Donald Mevicker, "Buying a Curator: Establishing Anthropology at Field Columbian Museum," in *Assembling the Past: Studies in the Professionalization of Archaeology*, ed. Alice B. Kehoe and Mary Beth Emmerechs (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1999), 37.

peripheries of the era's social elite. He associated himself with Boas, a Jewish immigrant, as well as a number of female anthropologists,⁵ an uncommon position at the time.

Evidence of this can be seen in the case of Frances Eliza Babbitt, a school teacher from Minnesota and an amateur archaeologist. While surveying along the Mississippi River Valley near Little Falls in 1879, Babbitt discovered a number of quartz pieces that appeared to have been worked. Believing the artifacts to be from the paleolithic period, she began a series of correspondences with members of the local historical community before finally contacting Putnam. After Babbitt published her findings in 1883, Putnam defended her work nationally as her suite of artifacts became part of the highly contentious "Paleolithic Debate" that raged across the United States in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Putnam was unfazed by Babbitt's amateur status, and was intrigued by the quality of her finds and what they were able to contribute to archaeology as a whole. This relationship would be indicative of how he treated other anthropologists occupying the periphery of the discipline.

Using his influence, Putnam was able to offer Boas first a position in *Science*, and in the years that followed, a number of other jobs focused on academic and museum work. Throughout this time, Boas had been writing articles promoting his theories, one of the most notable being *On Alternating Sounds*. Written in 1889, *On Alternating Sounds* challenges the Social Evolutionary concept of "sound blindness," a hindrance encountered by people less advanced on the social evolutionary spectrum when presented with "civilized" languages. According to this theory, a culture that has not progressed to a point where it can phonetically construct the words of a more rational language is as blind to that sound as a colorblind person is to different shades

⁵ David L. Browman, "Frederic Ward Putnam: Contributions to the Development of Archaeological Institutions and Encouragement of Women Practitioners," in *New Perspectives on the Origins of Americanist Archaeology*, ed. David L. Browman and Stephen Williams (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1998), 209-220.

of color. Boas disputes this by showing that the same “sound blindness” can exist within both parties of a bilingual conversation.⁶ He argues for cultural relativism, in which a culture should be examined within its own context. In this paper and others that share its basic principles, Boas criticizes the nature of Social Evolutionary Anthropology and its assertion that culture is singular and linear.

It was within these formative early years that Boas formed many of these relativist methodologies. It was also a time in which he found himself isolated from the upper echelons of American Anthropology. His narrative as a Jewish immigrant clashed with the predominantly heterogenous white, anglo-saxon, protestant identities of his contemporaries. Additionally, his increasing insistence in the relative nature of culture set him apart from the bulk of anthropologists who followed Social Evolutionary theories.⁷ In accordance with this, it is understandable that Boas possessed few allies within the field, and when *Science* informed him that it was no longer able to afford his salary, Boas found himself set adrift.

Luckily, Boas was able to secure a short expedition back to the Kwakiutl of British Columbia. His work was chiefly interested in the physical anthropology of deceased members of the tribe, carrying on the dubious anthropological tradition of exhuming Native American remains. From there he would take part in a number of other trips that were again located in British Columbia, this time focusing on the linguistic culture of the Native American tribes residing there. Boas would clash with the organizers of these expeditions who he believed didn't give him the confidence needed to carry out his work. Between expeditions, and with Putnam's help, Boas served as a professor of physical anthropology at Clark University before joining a

⁶ Boas and Stocking, *A Franz Boas Reader*, 72-76.

⁷ McVicker, “Buying a Curator,” 43-4.

mass exodus of faculty in 1892. Again, Boas had conflict with his employer when the University president pulled funding for one of his research proposals. Interestingly, Boas was the only member of the exodus not to be hired by the newly formed University of Chicago.⁸

It was at this time that Putnam once more aided Boas in finding work. After Boas' departure from Clark University, Putnam hired him as a fall lecturer at Harvard to help him stay on his feet. Following this Putnam would provide Boas with the potential for a stable and continuous career in Chicago. After being named head of the Chicago World's Columbian Exhibition's Anthropology Department, Putnam quickly positioned Boas as his chief assistant and placed him in command of the physical anthropology displays. At the fair's conclusion, the businessman Marshall Field agreed to fund a museum from which the anthropological materials collected for the fair would be displayed. Putnam used what leverage he could to ensure that Boas, who was in charge of organizing the exhibits, would be retained as curator once the museum was established. These plans fell through, however, and Boas once again found his career in flux.

Following Boas' departure from Chicago, he would find himself unemployed for almost two years before Putnam was once again able to offer him placement, first at the American Museum of Natural History and then at New York's Columbia University. From his initial position as a lecturer of physical anthropology at Columbia, Boas was able to expand his role within the University to professor of anthropology in 1899. From here, Boas strengthened the relationship between the American Museum and Columbia University, creating a platform from which he was able to profoundly influence the course of anthropology in the first half of the

⁸ Herbert, "The Passion of Franz Boas," 453.

twentieth century. His students in turn would spread throughout the country and reframe anthropological thought and theory, creating the framework that much of contemporary anthropology is built upon today.⁹ Although the theories that inform contemporary anthropological research have progressed from those that Boas championed, his insistence on utilizing cultural relativism as well as his belief in anthropology including a four field approach of archaeological, ethnographic, physical, and linguistic studies have all remained hallmarks of the American discipline.

Social Evolutionary Anthropology and Imperialist Attitudes

The late Nineteenth Century was a time of dramatic change in the interpretation of American Expansion. The encompassing spirit of Manifest Destiny helped the nation's Western borders to spread deep into the heart of the continent, eventually finding its completion on the beaches of the Pacific Ocean. This land was seen as a blank slate, a canvas upon which settlers could paint their own vision of the American Dream. The fact that this land was already occupied by indigenous communities, as it had been for many thousands of years, was of little consequence to the arriving settler-colonists. The European powers had for centuries viewed the Native people of the Americas as simple occupants of the land who had neither the right, nor the ability, to govern it themselves. They had no issue carving out vast swathes of territory in the North American continent, swapping and selling these territories with no thought given to the Native populations. This would lead to widespread conflict across the ever-shrinking frontier, as

⁹ Alexander Lesser, "Franz Boas," in *Totems and Teachers: Key Figures in the History of Anthropology* edited by Sydel Silverman. (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira, 2003), 2.

settler-colonists who saw the land as theirs by divine right, clashed with American Indians whose ancestral territories were being stolen away before their eyes.¹⁰ The history of the United States is rife with “Indian Wars,” with each American victory seen as a triumph of Western reason over Native barbarism. To intellectuals and the public of the time, they were seen as wars of progress.

Scientific thought of the early Nineteenth Century would mimic and support this ideology. One of the prevailing anthropological theories championed a “polygenetic” description of the people of the earth. This world view described the physical differences between peoples as caused by their distinct origins. Its followers postulated that God had created three separate, stratified races of humanity. According to this thinking, the pinnacle of humanity was occupied by “Caucasoid” whites. The “Mongoloid” and “Negroid” races of Africa, Asia, and the Americas lagged behind the superior Caucasoids, both intellectually and physically.¹¹ This view of humanity gave the colonial powers of the era *carte blanche* in their dealings with the native populations of their present as well as in their prospective imperial holdings. Natives were conceived of as literal subhumans, both unwilling and unable to raise themselves to the cultural heights of European Culture. The territories that they held were squandered in their incapable hands, making it only right that colonist intervention and occupation occur.

Darwin’s writings in the middle of the century would send shockwaves through the scientific community. Anthropology would soon adopt a number of the principles of evolutionary advancement in its classification of the people of the Earth. The American scholar Lewis Henry Morgan was one of the most prominent practitioners of this theory. He cast aside

¹⁰ Anton Treuer, *The Indian Wars*. (Washington, DC: National Geographic, 2016), 9.

¹¹ Van Dusenbery, “Paradigmatic Traditions in the Pre-history of Anthropology.” (Lecture at Hamline University, St. Paul, Minnesota, February 6, 2017).

the concept of polygenesis, instead claiming that all of humanity carried the same cultural ability, sharing a sense of “psychic unity.”¹² According to Morgan, there existed but one “culture” and that all groups existed somewhere along its linear spectrum. Lowly Savages occupied its bottom rungs, with Barbarians perched above them. Civilization stood atop the hierarchy. Morgan believed that every group of people had the ability to advance from Savagery to Civilization. Advancement was made when a particular society utilized rationality to improve aspects of their community, bringing themselves up from a brutish mode of existence to a more civilized one. Naturally, Western European culture was the embodiment of Civilization. According to this way of thinking, the societal ancestors of the European powers had used rationality to elevate their level of culture, and they now stood as beacons of progress in a dark and uncivilized world.¹³

It is from this method of reasoning that anthropology and the shrinking frontier converged. Anthropologists became obsessed with finding what they considered to be the most primitive society. Expeditions set out to gather what cultural materials could be extracted from the surviving Native American Tribes. Everything from ethnographies to tools were recorded and brought to anthropologists who would then seek to classify them within a hierarchy of like subject matter. Scholars spent their years compiling lists of individual aspects of culture, ranging from the physical (weapons, architecture), to the more abstract (kinship systems, religion) in an attempt to chronicle the ascent of rationality. These lists were arbitrary, with no attention paid to how the items or concepts existed within a given culture. The sole goal of anthropology was to describe and illustrate the cultural progress of man. Societies that were primitive in the eyes of anthropology and to America as a whole were fetishized as they were thought to give observers a

¹²Dusenbery, “Paradigmatic Traditions.”

¹³ Dusenbery, “Paradigmatic Traditions.”

glimpse into the past. Because culture was understood to be linear, the more primitive a society was, the more base, and in a sense, pure it was as well. By bookending the spectrum of Culture with simple savagery at one extreme and Western Civilization at the other, scientists saw themselves able to fill in the blank spaces with existing societies in an attempt to weave a rich tapestry documenting the history and progress of humanity.¹⁴ In the preface of his influential 1865 work *Prehistoric Man: Researches into the Origin of Civilisation in the Old and the New World*, archaeologist Daniel Wilson wrote: "...the study alike of the prehistoric and the un-historic races of America is replete with promise of novel truths in reference to primeval man."¹⁵

Positioned alongside Morgan in terms of influence within Social Evolutionary Anthropology was the British anthropologist E.B. Tylor. Together, their works would frame anthropological theories and the principles of museum anthropology for decades. *The Science of Culture*, the first chapter of the first volume of Tylor's broadly researched *Primitive Culture* was first published in 1873. In it, he remarks on the evolutionary nature of culture, and defines the role of the ethnologist in understanding past and present societies. Tylor begins by broadly defining culture as singular, allowing him to use his evolutionary framework to analyze the history and progression of man as a universally travelled causeway. He opens by stating: "Culture or Civilization, taken in the wide ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society."¹⁶

¹⁴ Dusenbery, "Paradigmatic Traditions."

¹⁵ Daniel Wilson, *Prehistoric Man: Researches into the Origin of Civilisation in the Old and the New World* (London: Macmillan and co, 1865), xvii.

¹⁶ Edward B. Tylor, *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Language, Art and Custom*. (New York, NY: Henry Holt and Company, 1889), 1.

To Tylor, culture and civilization are one and the same. Although different collections of people may occupy varying positions of “culture”, they are all arranged along the same linear tract. This opens the door for a ranking system that categorizes social progress, using the facets of culture that he provides. Societies may be linked and bracketed by how their individual morals, belief systems and technologies match with others through space and time. These brackets become a classificatory system through which the trek of human progress can be analyzed.

Tylor also stresses the unity of mankind by doing away with the notion that physical characteristics are a determinant in a people’s quest for civilization. He insists that humanity is not divided into races that predetermine their ability to advance along his social ladder. By disregarding race, he frees himself to study and rank people based only upon their cultural achievements. Tylor places himself and other anthropologists as the arbiters of human progress and categorization. Under the guise of objective research, he creates a subjective system from which he is able to use his own rationality to classify societies.¹⁷

Concerning museum studies, Tylor writes: “How true a generalization this is, any Ethnological Museum may show. Examine for instance the edged and pointed instruments in such a collection...most or all belong with only differences to detail to races the most various.”¹⁸ Here, Tylor comments on two important points. The first follows the general theme of the work by disregarding culturally unique practices by associating them with trivial similarities across time and space. The second, and more contextually useful when investigating Boas, is the belief that museum pieces should be used to demonstrate universality. The two go hand in hand. By

¹⁷ Taylor, *Primitive Culture*, 7.

¹⁸ Taylor, *Primitive Man*, 6.

denying a culture agency, Tylor glosses over its individuality by highlighting only superficial similarities. This practice is both reinforced and fueled by the organization of museum exhibits. Different cultural objects are banded together regardless of their origin to illustrate the theory of social evolution. The physical grouping of these items in turn affirms that all societies occupy the same linear plane, and that contextual differences mean little. Culture, by Tylor's definition, is a monolithic structure, not a series of organic lifeways. The study of culture, and of humanity, is the study of progress. To study individual cultures for their own sake is to miss the broader theoretical picture.

Following this model, anthropologists of the 1800's strove to construct a linear model of civilization, using existing societies to illustrate the progress of rationality and civilization. In this pursuit of knowledge, the loss of Native American lifeways would serve as a devastating blow. This fascination with Native Americans would be carried throughout the United States. With wars of conquest being fought farther and farther from the Nation's population hubs, Native Americans began to be seen, if not in a more benevolent, then a more curious manner. They were remnants of a culturally savage past, whose clashes with colonial expansion were a key narrative in the brief history of the United States.¹⁹ Now that this narrative was ending, the American public began to look back at their chief antagonists in their quest of expansion with a mix of pity, revulsion, and even pride.

Expositions of "Progress"

¹⁹ Katharine Bjork, "Scouting for Empire: Indian Country Abroad 1876-1916." (Unpublished manuscript, 2017), 13-17.

The Centennial Exhibition of 1876 in Philadelphia was a litmus test of American attitudes toward Native Americans. Exhibits pertaining to Native lifeways were organized under the supervision of the Smithsonian and the United States National Museum. It is worth noting that the other major exhibits organized by this Institution pertained to the natural resources of the United States, the thought process being that Native Americans occupied the same societal plane: they were a people who were acted upon, lacking the ability and agency to forge their own future. Otis T. Mason of the Smithsonian, the man charged with collecting materials for the exhibits, would cement this view, stating his belief that Native Americans were a “passive race” who would be exterminated and integrated by the “active race” of Anglo-Saxon Americans. Spencer F. Baird, the organizer of the exhibit would echo the Social Evolutionary thoughts of Lewis Morgan and E.B. Tylor by describing the exhibit as a reconstruction of “the past history of the different races of man.” Clearly, dissecting the Cultural strata of different Native American peoples could be used to stratigraphically categorize the development of humanity in its quest towards Civilization and its Eurocentric ideals.²⁰ Along this same line, it could also be used to display the cultural backwardness of Native Americans in comparison with the progress of Western society.

In order to convey this Cultural history, the exhibit was organized in a manner that reflected Social Evolutionary theory. The assembled items were organized not by tribe, or even region, but in a manner that showed their evolution, from simple to rationally elegant. In this method, every collected item was sorted with other like items, indifferent to the fact that the cultures that they represented spanned vast differences in both time and space. This system bore

²⁰ Robert W. Rydell, *All the World's a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876-1916*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 22-24.

an obvious resemblance to the lists compiled by Morgan and his contemporaries, in that unique cultural affinities were abandoned in favor of arbitrary systems of classification. Mason himself would later write that Tylor's works were all but required readings for any aspiring anthropologist, especially in regards to museum studies.²¹ Although this system was a success in that it clearly illustrated the anthropological thought of the time, its message fell flat in regards to the general public. The materials were displayed in a manner that seemed to hold little organizational merit, leaving the exhibit void of any educational message save the all encompassing mantra of civilizational progress.²²

Progress was the driving theme of the Exhibition. Many of the more prominent exhibitions displayed the technological advances made by the United States, as well as showcasing art from across the world.²³ In this regard, Baird's exhibit on Native Americans and Cultural Evolution only served to provide an antithesis for the drive to modernity. The items showcased reinforced the nation's views that Native American lifeways were nothing but a hindrance in the march of Progress, and that they had little to offer the civilized world besides a chronicling of humanity's brutish past. In *The Great Centennial Exhibition Illustrated*, a contemporary tome highlighting the wonders found within the Exhibition, not a single piece of Native American art is included. Its 544 pages are devoted to European and American art and technology; in short, to Western Progress. While the work itself shows no pieces of art or culture materials made by Native Americans, it does contain countless examples of Native Americans serving as the aesthetic muse. Examples range from a lamp, whose stem is held aloft by the proverbial "Noble Savage," to a bronze statue depicting a buffalo being pierced by a Native

²¹ Otis T. Mason, *Progress of Anthropology in 1890*. (Washington: G.P.O., 1891), 529.

²² Rydell, *All the World's a Fair*, 25.

²³ Bjork, "Scouting for Empire," 13.

American riding equestrian.²⁴ This subjugation of Native Americans to passive roles within the sphere of the Exhibition only reinforced Mason's previously stated claim.

While working for the journal *Science* in 1887, Boas used the podium it provided to criticize Mason on his methods of museum management. Mason was still employed as the curator of the Smithsonian and United States National Museum, and enjoyed the prestige of holding such a prominent title. Boas found issue with Mason's collections and their lack of structure and organization, as they continued to follow the Social Evolutionary theories of the day. Boas insisted that it was impossible to truly understand the materials if they were separated from their culturally analogous items. He even began entertaining the notion that there was no singular "Culture" and that instead a multitude of cultures existed, each indicative of the society that forged them.

In his letter within *Science*, Boas first criticizes the classificatory system used by Mason and other museum anthropologists. He writes:

From a collection of string instruments, flutes, or drums of 'savage' tribes and the modern orchestra, we cannot derive any conclusion but that similar means have been applied by all peoples to make music. The character of their music, the only object worth studying, which determines the form of the instruments, cannot be understood from the single instrument, but requires a complete collection of the single tribe.²⁵

²⁴ Philip T. Sandhurst, *The Great Centennial Exhibition Critically Described and Illustrated*, (Philadelphia: P. W. Ziegler & co, 1876).

²⁵ Franz Boas, "The Occurrence of Similar Inventions in Areas Widely Apart." *Science*, 9 (1887): 486.

Here, Boas dismisses social evolution's linear classificatory system of placing like with like, and insists that such practices miss the point of true ethnographic research. Mason and other Smithsonian anthropologists organized their exhibits by using evolutionary framework to place musical instruments within their proper progressive order. It is at this point that social evolutionists conclude their research. The line of progress has been formed. Boas finds himself left unsatisfied being unable to find any sort of analysis, save that all societies make some form of music. He wishes to investigate the music of a particular culture itself. He sees that he is unable to make inferences based on a singular instrument placed alongside other instruments that share the same cultural slot within an imposed system of evolutionary progression. For Boas, the only true way to understand a cultural item or practice is to see how it fits within the social framework of the society that employs it.

Mason responds with a letter containing the following excerpt:

I think it is a growing conviction that inventions of both customs and things spring from prior inventions, just as life springs from life, and that the sooner we recognize the fact that in the study of arts, institutions, language, knowledge, customs, religions, and races of men, we must always apply the methods and instrumentalities of the biologist, the sooner will our beloved science stand upon an immovable foundation.²⁶

²⁶ Otis T. Mason, "The Occurrence of Similar Inventions in Areas Widely Apart." *Science*, 9 (1887): 534.

Mason echoes the previous sentiments of Tylor in this passage. Like Tylor, Mason likens ethnography and the collection of cultural material goods to a naturalist compiling classificatory lists. It is the job of the anthropologist to understand the movement of culture through time and to use that knowledge to label the placement of individual groups along its course. He sees customs and material inventions as having a linear placement. Within this methodology, all like effects share a common cause. The end goal of this study, according to Mason, is to compile every ounce of ethnographic data to fill in the cultural progression of man. With this knowledge, anthropologists would be able to fully understand human history and would be able to implement their own classificatory systems in an unrivaled fashion.

Boas responds, stating:

One method of studying them ('the physical and psychical character of men')-and this is Professor Mason's method-is to compare the phenomena, and to draw conclusions by analogy. The other method is to study phenomena arising from a common psychical cause among all tribes and as influenced by their surroundings... For this method of study, the tribal arrangement of museum specimens is the only satisfactory one...²⁷

Boas again reiterates his belief that the only way to understand the culture of a people is to observe their suite of customs and material goods as a whole. As such, the placement of items within a museum must illustrate the individuality of a group that stems from their physical

²⁷ Franz Boas, "Museums of Ethnology and their Classification." *Science*, 9 (1887): 588.

circumstances. Boas was no environmental determinist, but he did believe that the geography of a place impacted the cultures that it fostered. As noted above, it was his interest in the confluence of geography and culture in Baffin Island that first propelled him towards a career in anthropology. In this segment, Boas again denounces generalizing cultures. He sees Mason as missing the point of anthropology by analyzing societies solely by use of superficially analogous traits shared across the expanse of time.

He follows this criticism with another: "The outward appearance of two phenomena may be identical, yet their immanent qualities may be altogether different: therefore arguments from analogies of the outward appearance such as shown in Professor Mason's collections, are deceptive."²⁸

This is the root of Boas's argument and issue with Mason and his work. Mason viewed the organization of his exhibits in the same manner as Tylor described in his writings. Items that look alike and share the same perceived basic purpose belong within the same classificatory suite. As Tylor himself stated, the subtle cultural differences between like objects that share a similar basic use are of no concern in the grand cultural scheme of social evolution. The meaning of an object is useless outside of its productive capacity and placement within a larger evolutionary tract.

Boas strongly disagrees with this. He sees such similarities as trivial without understanding their deeper cultural meaning. To create analogies based only off use and appearance is to erect a hollow structure devoid of substance. For him, the only true way of studying anthropology, and of displaying it to the public, is to understand the cultural

²⁸ Boas, "Museums of Ethnology and their Classification" *Science* 9 (1887): 589.

significance of an item, and how it would fit within the culture as a whole. To so, Boas, insists that items be placed together to better understand them as a whole.

Boas was not the only anthropologist to find fault with this linear model of culture. James Mooney, a second generation Irish immigrant and an ethnographer with the Federal Bureau of Ethnography, earned sharp criticism for his relativist analysis of the Ghost Dance Religion in 1893. Seen by many Americans as an unwelcome renaissance of Native American Spirituality, the Ghost Dance Religion championed a return to traditional lifeways coupled with the appearance of a messianic figure.

The introduction to Mooney's *The Ghost Dance Religion* contains the following excerpt: "The doctrines of the Hindu avatar, the Hebrew Messiah, the Christian millenium, and the Hesûnanin of the Indian Ghost dance are all essentially the same, and have their origin in a hope and longing common to all humanity."²⁹

This comparison to Western Religion, as well as the perceived legitimization of Native American religion was controversial. John Wesley Powell, director of the Bureau of Ethnology at the time and a legendary figure within the anthropological community published his correspondence's work (it was after all Powell who initially hired Mooney and subsequently sent him to study the Ghost Dance), but did what he could to distance himself from the claims that the work raised. His introduction to the publication in which the piece was included lambasted Mooney's claims on the grounds of social evolutionary theory.³⁰ The Smithsonian soon took an interest in Mooney's writings, with its director S.P. Langley contacting Powell over its

²⁹ James Mooney, "The Ghost Dance Religion," in *Fourteenth Annual Report of the Bureau of Ethnology to the Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution: 1892-3* ed. J.W. Powell (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1893), 657.

³⁰ Michael A. Elliot, "James Mooney's Ghost-Dance Religion." 215.

controversial claims. The act of using Christian beliefs to describe a Native American religion were scandalous, and Langley feared that it could potentially result in a withdrawal of government funds towards his institution.³¹ Although nothing would come of these fears, the attitudes held by members of the upper echelons of Federal anthropology shows a strong distrust towards relativist thinking.

Although taking place almost 20 years later, The Chicago World's Columbian Exhibition of 1893 carried many of the same themes as its Philadelphian predecessor and of the years separating them. Progress again was the mantra. The highlight of the Exhibition was to be the "White City," a collection of massive, sparkingly white buildings, meant to symbolize an American Utopia. Anthropology was once more to hold a prominent position within the festivities. The Smithsonian Museum would be centrally located while the Exhibition's own anthropology department would construct its own structure at the opposite end of the grounds.³² Putnam was a key anthropological figure within the Exhibition, having been one of the initial catalytic forces in lobbying for an anthropological presence within the Fair's grounds. As a result, he was placed in command of the Department for Archaeology and Ethnology.³³ He had originally been charged with control of the Midway Plaisance, a strip of land that led to the White City. Although this task proved beyond his means and was removed from his care, Putnam was able to secure the construction of the exhibition's anthropological building, albeit

³¹ Louis S. Warren, *God's Red Son*: 363.

³² Rydell, *All the World's a Fair*, 55-57.

³³ Browman, Putnam, contributions, 221.

one that was completed long after the Exhibition's opening.³⁴ He selected Boas as his chief assistant, and had him complete many of the organizational duties attached to the project.³⁵

Mason, still with the Smithsonian, saw the Exhibition as a chance again to highlight the progress of culture, but also as a way to show the public the growth of Anthropology. He and Putnam secured massive amounts of cultural items from across the globe, with an emphasis on North America. Boas himself contributed many Kwakiutl artifacts, and even brought a small contingent of the group to take part in the Exposition's festivities. While Putnam wanted to advance anthropology and educate the masses, he above all desired that his field become popularized within the public sphere. He was able to entice "Natives" from across the globe to erect traditional villages along the Plaisance. Here, they became little more than sideshow attractions. In an strikingly obvious manner, the line of cultures was arranged in a way that mirrored Evolutionary thinking, culminating with the White City itself.³⁶

Putnam's rationale for contributing to the Columbian exhibition was far from apolitical. In Chicago, he saw a burgeoning cultural center and the opportunity to develop a satellite installation from which he could place one of his supporters in an attempt to compete with Federal anthropologists. Near the conclusion of the Exhibition, the anthropological community as a whole was able to secure the financial backing of the prominent Chicago business mogul Marshall Field to open a museum from which to showcase the vast collection of cultural artifacts assembled for the fair. This newly established museum would become a battleground between Putnam and his Smithsonian counterparts.³⁷

³⁴ Erik Larson, *The Devil in the White City: Murder, Magic, and Madness at the Fair that Changed America* (New York: Vintage Books, 2003), 141.

³⁵ Meltzer, "When destiny takes a turn for the worse," 183.

³⁶ Rydell, *All the World's a Fair*, 57.

³⁷ Donald Mcvicker, "Buying a Curator" 37-38.

The Columbian Field Museum

Although the mass confusion of the Exposition, with its vast array of attractions as well as organizational hiccups, limited the public success that American Anthropology felt, the community as a whole were able to secure a victory in the construction of what would become the Chicago Field Museum. Putnam had lobbied for a museum from the time he joined the Exposition's staff, arguing that the wealth of goods that had been procured deserved a permanent home. Following Marshall Field's donation ensuring that one would be built, Putnam wasted no time in positioning Boas as the interim curator of the Anthropology Department, recommending him for the official position when it became available.³⁸

As mentioned previously, Putnam had grand ambitions of creating an institution in Chicago that mirrored his own views of what anthropology should be. He envisioned himself as the Scientific chair of the newly formed museum with Boas, placed as the anthropological curator. In an attempt to strengthen his position, Putnam made overtures to the University of Chicago in the hopes of creating a positive relationship between the two institutions. These communications would fall flat, as interpersonal rivalries and the University's political ties to the Smithsonian quickly grounded Putnam's aspirations. Despite this, Putnam and Boas felt secure in their abilities to maintain control of anthropology within the Columbian Field Museum.³⁹

Controversy would arise when Putnam was accused of redirecting artifacts and exhibit pieces to his own Peabody Museum at Harvard. Boas, as one of Putnam's close associates,

³⁸ Meltzer, "When destiny takes a turn for the worse," 187.

³⁹ Mevicker, "Buying a Curator," 38-40.

would find himself unwittingly lumped in with the charges. This drama only served to exacerbate an already difficult position for Boas. Despite this, Putnam continued to assure Boas that the position would be his, despite the deep rumblings of dissent that surrounded him.⁴⁰

With this, and despite all of his assurances, once Putnam returned to his professorship at Harvard, Boas found his position within the museum untenable. The University of Chicago viewed Putnam, and by extension Boas, as a threat, and worked quickly to quell any possible competition. Thomas Chamberlin, chair of the geology department at the University, used the museum as a carrot to entice prominent Federal scholars to the institution. He had the political and social connections to do as he pleased, and he had his attention locked on one particular candidate in William H. Holmes.⁴¹

Holmes was considered one of the brightest minds in the field of anthropology. He had worked as a part of the United States Geological Survey before leaving in 1889 to join the Smithsonian Museum. He earned the praise and admiration of many of the nation's federal anthropologists with his role in what the historian of anthropology David Meltzer calls the "Great Paleolithic War." Through extensive lecturing and publication, Holmes was able to ally himself with the established elite of anthropology in a large scale intradisciplinary debate. Putnam personally found Holmes's findings problematic and was a vocal critic of his work, arguing that his archaeological methodologies were unsound. It was during these debates that Holmes earned the respect of Chamberlin.

Under Mason, Holmes contributed to the Smithsonian's exhibits during the Exposition, showing the Cultural Evolution of mankind through striking mannequins, as well as presenting

⁴⁰ McVicker, "Buying a Curator," 41-42.

⁴¹ Meltzer, "When destiny takes a turn for the worse," 187-189.

on his research conducted on paleolithic projectile points.⁴² Although he already held a lucrative position, Holmes jumped at the opportunity to become the anthropological head of the Field Museum when Chamberlin offered it to him.⁴³ When Boas learned that he was likely going to be passed over for the job in favor of a “Washington Ethnologist,” he wrote to Holmes that “If this were true, I would consider it, of course an unsurpassed insult...”⁴⁴

It is unclear whether or not Boas knew that Holmes was in fact the benefactor of his misfortune. Regardless of this, Boas was clearly hurt by the knowledge that the curatorship had eluded him. Boas’s career was on rickety footing. As noted previously, following the mass departure of professors from Clark University, Boas was the only member of the group to not be hired by the new University of Chicago. Putnam did his best to ensure that Boas was secure by successfully installing him as the Chicago Field Museum’s interim curator once the fair closed. The loss of what Boas likely assumed was a guaranteed position would have been an intense shock. What would have made matters worse was that the position was likely to be given to a member of the Smithsonian, an institution that Boas had a distaste for.

After learning that Holmes had indeed been offered the position, Boas abandoned what was left of the project and swiftly tendered his resignation. He wrote to the president of the Museum:

As you cannot give me the assurance that since I have had temporary charge of the Anthropological Department nobody besides myself has been or is being

⁴² Meltzer, “When destiny takes a turn for the worse,” 185.

⁴³ Meltzer, “When destiny takes a turn for the worse,” 189.

⁴⁴ Franz Boas to William H. Holmes, February 17, 1894. Quoted from Donald Mevicker, “Putnam, Boas, Holmes,” *History of Anthropology Newsletter* 17 no. 2 (December 1990): 4.

considered in connection with the position of Director of the Department of Anthropology, I decline to work for the Museum any longer under present terms.

45

This sentiment was backed by Putnam who would later write: “After getting all this hard labor out of him (Boas) they have simply kicked him out and put in Holmes of Washington in his place...”⁴⁶

It is clear that both Boas and Putnam believe that Boas should have received the position and that he was robbed by outside forces. Both men also use the descriptive term “Washington” as a negative connotation, highlighting their competition with the Smithsonian. Boas had had his very public debate with its leading anthropologist, while Putnam had been forced to coexist with their delegates at the Columbian Exhibition who had their own federally funded anthropology exhibit. Although there is no record of animosity between the two parties, it must have been difficult for Putnam to have his exhibits relegated to the outskirts of the Exhibition, while the Smithsonian’s building resided squarely within the White City.

The two also make the snub a personal issue. Putnam paints a picture of Boas working tirelessly (which by all accounts he did) only to be replaced at the last minute by a man who would receive all of the benefits. Boas himself turns the rejection into a matter of pride. He frames the issue into one where he was the rightful recipient of the curatorship, and that the

⁴⁵ Franz Boas to Frederick Skiff, February 19, 1894. Quoted from Donald Mcvicker, “Putnam, Boas, Holmes,” *History of Anthropology Newsletter* 17 no. 2 (December 1990): 4-5.

⁴⁶ Frederick Putnam to Edward Thompson, May 19, 1894. Quoted from Donald Mcvicker, “Putnam, Boas, Holmes,” *History of Anthropology Newsletter* 17 no. 2 (December 1990): 5.

interim label was only for ceremony. He did not lose the job; rather, it was taken away from him by the betrayal of the Museum's staff. The position was meant to be his, with the duplicity of the Museum forcing him to quit rather than be further humiliated.

Contemporary Analyses

Following his rebuke in Chicago, Boas would continue his anthropological career at Columbia in New York, eventually ascending to the pinnacle of the field. As noted earlier in this essay, Boas is considered a foundational figure within the discipline of Anthropology with his cultural relativist themes becoming a hallmark of modern anthropological theory. That such a prominent figure in the world of anthropology was unable to obtain a job that was all but earmarked for him has piqued the interest of contemporary authors in recent years. The rationales raised to explain Boas' experience in Chicago range from the nativist attitudes found within the anthropological community at the time, to the theoretical divides that separated Boas from many of his contemporaries, and finally to the political underpinnings associated with the Columbian Field Museum. While none of these factors can reasonably be cited as the sole contributor to Boas' unsuccessful attempt to remain in Chicago, a combination of all three factors is worth investigating.

Alice Kehoe suggests that Boas' Jewish heritage was a key determinant in his rejection in her introductory essay to the book *Multiple Pasts*. Boas, who was raised and educated in Germany, was no stranger to discrimination. His face bore scars from duels fought over insults targeted at his Jewish ancestry. Kehoe asserts that the racial atmosphere was no better in the

United States. American anthropologists, who Kehoe characterizes as products of wealthy upbringings and Ivy League educations, were unable to tolerate such a prestigious position belonging to a Jewish man. As evidence to support her claim, Kehoe cites an anti-semitic outburst made in 1919 by W.H. Holmes, the man who incidentally had received the Curator position over Boas in Chicago, as well as a remark included in one of Holmes' correspondances.

⁴⁷ A number of Kehoe's writings focus on the professionalization of anthropology and the role that members of minority groups and women played in the advancement of the field. By looking at the social history of the field, Kehoe's work often takes a progressive and sociological approach to the realities faced by aspiring anthropologists who were not members of the social elite. Racial discrimination, however detrimental it was to him, can only be considered a piece of the narrative when delving into Boas' experience in Chicago.

Another, more indirect argument focusing on the theoretical divide that marked the event is made by Robert Rydell in "All the World's a Fair." According to Rydell, the philosophical thrust of the Columbian Exposition was to demonstrate the societal progress achieved not only by Western Civilization, but by the United States in particular. The prevailing anthropological and cultural thought of the time was that cultures evolved along a linear tract, and that Western European and American cultures represented the pinnacle of human progress. The organization of the fair was meant to exemplify this. Homes and villages of indigenous peoples from across the world were erected along the midway, allowing visitors to visualize the progression of culture from savagery to civilization, edified with the Exposition's pristine "White City" at the midway's end. Standing in stark contrast to the traditional homes of the indigenous peoples

⁴⁷ Alice Kehoe, "Multiple Pasts," in *Assembling the Past: Studies in the Professionalization of Archaeology*. A. B. Kehoe and M. B. Emmerichs, eds. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2011), 19-23.

placed along the Exposition's plaisance, the White City housed buildings filled with exhibits extolling the virtues of civilized society. The Anthropological exhibits also demonstrated this thought process through their organization of the cultural materials collected from Native Americans. Materials were displayed with no thought given to the cultures from which they originated from, with the focus instead being placed on where each individual item fit on the scale of cultural evolution. Boas broke from this tradition by suggesting that cultural relativity should be observed when discussing other societies, and that linear cultural evolution didn't exist.⁴⁸

The noted historian George Stocking also wrote about the theoretical divide between Boas and Cultural Evolutionists. In his books *Victorian Anthropology* and *Delimiting Anthropology: Occasional Inquiries and Reflections*, Stocking recounts the divide between Boasian and Evolutionary anthropology. Stocking describes the theoretical framework of each approach and analyzes the ramifications of each. While the writings provide an exhaustive account of the theoretical debate between the two parties, Stocking focuses mainly on events occurring after the turn of the twentieth century with only a small portion of *Delimiting Anthropology* exploring Boas' relationship with the concept of Cultural Evolution prior to 1893. No mention is made of the Columbian Exhibition in either text. Both Stocking and Rydell investigate the concept of Social Evolutionary Theory and its impact on not only academic studies, but on the culture of the era. Neither author places focus on role that this had on the early professional career of Boas, but both provide a framework from which an investigation into such a topic is able to be completed.

⁴⁸Robert W. Rydell, *World of fairs: The century-of-progress expositions*. Chicago, Ill: University of Chicago Press, 1993.

David Melzer looks into the internal politics and relationships between prominent anthropologists of the time in his analysis of the matter in “When Destiny Takes a Turn for the Worse: William Henry Holmes and, Incidentally, Franz Boas in Chicago, 1892-97” In this essay, he identifies the ambitions of Thomas Chamberlin of the University of Chicago, as well as the migration of leading anthropologists between government and scholarly institutions. Chamberlin, according to Melzer, wanted to secure as many high profile academics as possible for the newly founded University of Chicago, and saw the Field Museum as a recruiting tool to draw them into the city. Using his connections, Chamberlin secured W.H. Holmes Curatorship of Anthropology as a method of anchoring him in Chicago where he was to become a resident professor at the University. Melzer suggests that while Holmes and Boas harbored a professional rivalry at the time, there were no hints of the eventual animosity displayed over 20 years later in the instance cited by Kehoe. In addition to Chamberlin’s manipulations, Melzer also describes the period of flux experienced in American Anthropology at the time. Well established leaders in the field were playing a game of musical chairs with the prestige positions available, and in the end, Boas became the odd man out. It is worth noting that Holmes had the higher pedigree of the two candidates at the time, and so the decision wasn’t as highly scrutinized in contemporary circles.⁴⁹ While this article claims that Boas was not wronged in the process of filling the curatorship, Melzer’s other writings show a strong sympathetic stance in regards to Holmes. Melzer is considered one of the premier scholars on the “Great Paleolithic Debate,” a deeply contentious topic in late 19th century anthropology, and a platform from which Holmes gained significant prestige. Many of Melzer’s writings on Holmes lionize him and laud his role in advancing

⁴⁹ David J. Meltzer, “When destiny takes a turn for the worse: William Henry Holmes and, incidentally, Franz Boas in Chicago, 1892-97”. *Histories of Anthropology Annual* 6 (1) (2010), 171-224.

archaeological research in the United States. This is a notable stance to take for two reasons. First, Holmes and his supporters decisively found themselves on the losing side of the debate. Second, Holmes and the methods of excavation conducted by his fellow federally funded researchers was considered unorganized and reckless by members of the academic community. Melzer's regard for Holmes shows an obvious bias towards him, and must be accounted for when reading his materials.

Donald McVicker's essay, *Buying a Curator*, is the most well rounded piece of literature focusing on Boas, Holmes, and the Columbian Museum. Within it, he cites both the political and racial motivations that converged to throw Boas out of Chicago. Chicago, in an escalating rivalry with New York to become the center of culture and commerce within the United States, did not want to see the momentum stemming from their success at the Columbian Exhibition slowed. From this underlying anxiety to be considered a cosmopolitan center, the Columbian Field Museum as envisioned by its Chicago based directors would put a premium on spectacle rather than scientific substance. Putnam, with his desire for anthropology to be as methodologically scientific as possible, strongly disagreed with this sentiment, and would carry a tendentious relationship with the board of the museum throughout his time in Chicago.

The University of Chicago would also vie for control of the Museum. The newly appointed head of the University's geology department, Thomas Chamberlin, formerly of the U.S. Geological Survey, saw in the museum a chance to enhance the political clout of the University not only within Chicago but the nation as a whole. By using his connections to support Holmes' bid for curatorship of the anthropology department, he hoped to bring the Field Museum under the direct control of his university. This conglomeration of power would also

establish Chicago as an ally of Federal Anthropology and would allow for a secondary center of influence in its ongoing struggle with academic anthropology. Putnam, who wanted Chicago for the same reasons, found himself the target of a series of slanderous accusations concerning both the exploitation of museum funds as well as his supposed bureaucratic inadequacy.

When Putnam returned to Harvard in a huff, Boas would be forced to fend for himself. Despite Putnam's continued assurances that the curatorship would be his, Boas' position was far from secure. As McVicker writes: "If Putnam assumed that the powers of Chicago were going to be content hiring as their new curator of anthropology a young, not yet well-known, German-Jewish immigrant... he clearly did not understand Chicago's money and its second city boosterism."⁵⁰

It should come as no surprise following this argument that the well connected, Federally sponsored, WASP candidate in Holmes was the preferred candidate. Holmes represented everything that Boas was not, and in a city craving the respect that it felt it was due, he was the clear choice for curator of anthropology.⁵¹

The arguments of race, theoretical divides, and personal connections all illustrate the main viewpoints regarding the decision of Holmes over Boas. Race, although not likely an overt determinant, was clearly a subversive influence in Boas's attempts to find employment. The contentious relationship between Boas and the Smithsonian also cannot be ignored. Smithsonian anthropologists had utilized their theoretical beliefs in the creation of numerous exhibits within the Columbian Exhibition. After seamlessly coupling their own findings with the message of progress found throughout the Columbian Exhibition, they were not willing to undergo scholarly

⁵⁰ McVicker, "Buying a Curator," 42-43.

⁵¹ McVicker, "Buying a Curator," 37-52.

introspection into the driving theory of the time. The last is the argument that internal politics played a key role in the decision. Boas and his allegiance with Putnam separated him from a number of his contemporaries who worked through the Smithsonian institution. While the issues of Race and Theory are nebulous and abstract, interactions between members of the anthropological community working toward their individual goals can be more easily studied. Boas, because of his theoretical beliefs and allegiance to Putnam, found himself in competition with his federal counterparts. This competition would come to a head in Chicago, which, thanks in part to the World's Columbian Exhibition, had become a cultural and scientific center in America. Both Putnam and the Smithsonian saw in it the potential to create a center of anthropology that mirrored their specific beliefs. Boas would be blocked from the curatorship because of this, and because of his peripheral status as a Jewish Immigrant.

Conclusion

The question of Franz Boas's departure from the Field Museum is a complicated and multifaceted one. There is no single, direct reason why he was passed over for the position of curator. This paper has sought to understand the intellectual climate of the time in an effort to recreate the theoretical divides that separated Boas from the bulk of the anthropological establishment. Through this angle of investigation, we are able to single out methodological differences as one component of the issue.

Boas, and by extension Putnam, found themselves situated across from the entrenched models of anthropological thought of the time. Although the research done by Holmes had won him broad acclaim, it was done within the confines of American anthropology's established methods of investigation and overarching theory of Social Evolutionary Theory. By abandoning this school of thought, Boas would find little support within the world of federal anthropology. It can be argued strongly that without the patronage of the already established Putnam, Boas would have found himself adrift with little prospect of obtaining a lucrative career.

It was this relationship with Putnam that would open, and ultimately help close the door for the possibility of working in Chicago. The sudden rise of the city as a cultural and scientific powerhouse made it highly sought after by Putnam and federal anthropologists alike. The aforementioned methodological debates had created a culture of competition between the two sides, with neither wanting the other to seize control of such an important institution in the museum. Putnam was outmaneuvered and overmatched in his attempt to claim Chicago, and Boas' potential curatorship were lost in the process.

Although political intrigue stemming from disagreements over the nature of anthropology can be seen as the most tangible piece of evidence concerning Boas and Chicago, it does not tell the whole story. As seen throughout this essay, Boas faced difficulties throughout his career due to his Jewish heritage and his immigrant status. Although Morgan's Social Evolutionary anthropology might have done away with racial bias in anthropology, the reality encountered by those living outside of society's social elite was not drastically changed. Boas and his early career provide a clear example of this, especially within the context of the Columbian Field Museum. Whatever methodological rifts existed between Putnam and his Federally connected

counterparts, it is clear that the patrons of the museum, with an eye towards prestige and glamor, would not have tolerated a Jewish man as one of the faces of their newly established landmark.

Whatever the reason for Boas's departure from the Columbian Museum of Chicago, it is clear that this event is a snapshot of a time of rapid change and upheaval in the field of American anthropology. By the turn of the century and continuing into the following decades, it would be Boas and his theories that would rule over the anthropological world. The late 1890's saw the gradual rise of Boas and a symbolic changing of the guard in terms of anthropological thought. His experience in Chicago can be seen as a microcosm of that change, and the resistance to it.

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